

A: Question number one.

Q: Well, first I'm going to introduce the whole thing. Good afternoon. Today is May 4th, 2017. My name is Helene Tishler. I'm here at the Newton City Hall Library with Mr. George Rivetz. Together we are participating in the Newton Talks Oral History Project that is being conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center. And thank you for being with us. It's really wonderful to have you here. So, we are going to talk a lot about your experiences and like to just find out what your connection to Newton is.

A: What's that?

Q: Your connection to Newton.

A: I live here.

__: Explain how long you've lived here.

A: I own a home, a two-family home in Newton Center and that's my connection. I've lived here since 1972.

__: 1972. He moved over from Brookline and he has been living here over 44 years.

A: Moved from Brookline.

Q: 44 years. Wonderful. And what were you doing before you entered the service?

A: I worked in the Post Office. I had two full time, well not full time, I worked full time in the Post Office for 52 years and I worked selling tickets for the Red Sox and Patriots for 38 years.

Q: And before you went into the military what were you doing then?

A: Then?

__: Before the military. The Red Sox weren't before the military.

A: That was before the military.

__: Not the Red Sox though.

A: Not the Red Sox. I was working in the Post Office before the 19--

__: 37.

A: 36, 37, and I got into the service 1942, and I stayed in the service until 1946.

Q: Okay. How did you join and why did you- Did you get to choose the specific branch at that time?

A: No.

Q: How did you get into that branch?

A: Well, originally I was deferred, because I was the sole supporter of my elderly father. He was in his 80's and they put me what they called 3A. That was a military deferment because I was the sole supporter of my father. But when Japan entered the war after we were attacked by Pearl Harbor the President decided that they want to eliminate the deferments and they raised the

budget that allowed my father to get \$50 dollars a month from the government so that I wouldn't have to support him so they could take me into the service.

Q: So you were drafted at that point.

A: So I was drafted at that time.

Q: Alright, and what branch did you serve in?

A: Well, I worked in the Post Office. Originally I was assigned to take care of the mail, all of the different mailings that the servicemen mailed to home and received and everything. It had to do with the Post Office, so they put me into the mailing service of the Army, stationed in South Boston. And I stayed there from 1942 to 1944. Then the law came out everybody has to serve at least a year overseas. That's when I decided to kill myself. [Laughter] But it didn't work. So, I took a physical, I got a physical, and then I had to serve at least a year overseas, but I had a choice, either go into the infantry or get a job on a troop ship and that carried a division of troops all over the world.

I stayed there from '44 to '46. We carried troops all over, England, Africa, Egypt, eventually Manilla, Hawaii, we were invading Italy, France, everywhere in the world that we had troops we carried the ship, by my ship 20,000 troops. We went in the convoy to the Atlantic, dropped the troops off, came home, refilled the ship again, kept going back and forth, back and forth while the war was on in Europe.

Q: And what did you do on the ship?

A: On the ship, did you ever hear of a PX?

Q: Yes.

A: Post Exchange. We worked six of us, we worked in the PX, taking care of like a store, like a grocery, like a store. Whatever the troops wanted we sold them, and that's what we did.

Q: And you supplied them, what did you supply them with, for example?

A: Pardon?

Q: What did you sell? What did you supply them with?

A: We sold everything, food, basically whatever any store would sell, ice cream, food, toothpaste-- I don't know-- anything that the soldier needed, cookies, crackers, bread, whatever. Now, if they wanted, now we're talking 20,000 troops, we didn't take care of 20,000, if you wanted a Coke you ordered a thousand bottles of Coke, but they signified a half a dozen troops from their 20,000 to come down to the basement there and where we had the bulk of our food. And they picked out a thousand bottles of Coke and passed them around. But we handled the individual requests, the small requests.

Q: In the PX.

A: And we collected French coins, British coins, whatever country we were.

Q: Did you get off the ship at any point?

A: Oh sure. I have some of the stories to tell you.

Q: Okay.

A: While we dropped the troops off before we reconditioned the ship we put more oil in it, we straightened, to get the return trip back home. We were based at New York, New York Harbor, so we had maybe about four or five days to take it easy, more or less, to look around the different countries before we had to go back. So, my first trip was Africa. I had a little French in high school, so I could speak a little French, but my basic real first trip was England, we brought over 20,000. This was before Pearl Harbor. We were helping the British fight the, we weren't fighting but we were helping them fight the Germans, so my first trip was England. Do you want me to tell you one of my stories?

Q: Yes, certainly. What was something very memorable?

A: Did you ever hear of Piccadilly Circus in England?

Q: Yes.

A: How did you know that?

Q: Well, I visited England.

A: And you visited Piccadilly Circus?

Q: Certainly.

A: But it's not a circus, is it?

Q: No. [Laughter]

A: I was brought up in the slums of Boston. Do you know part of Boston where North Station is? Alright. You know where the Boston Garden is?

Q: Yes.

A: That's where I lived, right around the area of the Boston Garden. And whenever there was a circus, do you ever hear of Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey?

Q: Sure.

A: Well, that to me was a circus. So when they tell me, I'm in England, "Let's sightsee. Let's go to Piccadilly Circus," so I said, "Wonderful. I haven't been to a circus since I was a child." You're smiling because you know that it wasn't the circus. So I go, "Let's go to the circus. I haven't been to a circus since I was eight years old." We go there, I pay \$15 dollars for admittance, and after an hour I say to the girl, "Where are the elephants?" She says to her boyfriend, "He called me an elephant." He beat me up and he threw me out. It wasn't until I was thrown out in the middle of London until I found out it wasn't the circus.

Q: How old were you then?

A: Too old to know better. I was--Do you know what it really was? Are you too young to know? A house of prostitution. And I asked her, "Where are the elephants?" She thought I called her an elephant. I was 20 years old at the time.

Q: And how was the rest of the time adapting to the military? When you got on the ship was it very difficult for you to adjust? Had you been through any training beforehand?

A: No.

Q: So, what was it like for you, the physical quarters, the barracks?

A: Seasick. It was a new experience. It was a giant ship of 35,000 tons. It was originally a private liner. The Moore McCormick lines, they had, I was on the Uruguay, they had three sister ships that we used during the war, Uruguay, the Brazil, and the Argentina. Whenever we went to Europe or Africa we went in the convoy with those three ships. Naturally with traveling through the Atlantic in a convoy the Germans were waiting. The planes attacked us, submarines attacked us, ships attacked us, and we were in constant danger. We were sunk once right outside the English Channel. Luckily we were right at the border of England, so the British sent a lot of ships and a lot of troops to save us.

Q: So, were there any casualties from that bombing?

A: Pardon?

Q: Did most people survive that bombing?

A: Oh sure, most of us survived. And from there we went into the invasion of Normandy, also the invasion of southern France. We didn't go into France right away. We helped the Normandy invasion, but we also fought to invade southern France, and originally we were in Africa first. From Africa we went to southern France and from southern France to Italy. In fact, I have a picture at home, I was on the Leaning Tower of Pisa, only I called it pizza. That's where I learned how to eat pizza. The Leaning Tower of Pisa, we were overlooking the big souvenir there. We had a wonderful time. It was dangerous, but we survived.

We had protection and we made, it was a war and we just hoped that we would survive.

Q: And what else do you--

A: For two years I was in the service before the war, before the ship, as I was in the Post Office there.

Q: Right. And what did you find that you remembered the most about those experiences?

A: How I survived.

Q: Yeah, positive or negative, certainly in the battle situations.

A: Well, I can-- Let me see. There was a time-- Did you ever hear of the Battle of the Bulge?

Q: Yes.

A: How come, you fought there?

Q: No, I was born after the war, but I do know about the Battle of the Bulge.

A: You heard about the Battle of the Bulge?

Q: Yes.

A: Now, the Battle of the Bulge was the final battle that took place between Germany and England, British and this country. The Battle of the Bulge took place in Belgium. Germany was just about finished. They made a very big mistake when they allowed, when they invaded Russia. Originally Hitler started the war by invading Poland, all the Baltic countries. It took him eight days to conquer France, eight days, that's all, and they were fighting, sending planes over to

England constantly. In fact, the worst traitor that I can tell, John Kennedy's father was the Ambassador to England, Joseph Kennedy, he's supposed to be on our side, right, wrong. When Germany got ready to invade England they were sending thousands and thousands of planes into England constantly, bombing all parts of England, killing thousands, and when Japan invaded Pearl Harbor naturally we became part of the war. So, now we're on England's side, so when Germany is ready to invade England Joseph Kennedy said to President Roosevelt, "Don't stop them. British," because he is an Irish Catholic and the Irish hated the English, because part of Ireland is divided between Northern Ireland, and you knew that the Irish and the English were bitter enemies. You knew that. So, Joseph Kennedy who was an Irish Catholic said to Roosevelt, "Don't stop them. Let England fall. They don't deserve anything." And that's when he, Roosevelt fired him.

Q: Fortunately we didn't heed that advice. But you were telling us a little bit about the Battle of the Bulge.

A: Oh, the Battle of the Bulge.

Q: What do you remember and what role did you have in that?

A: What I remember about the Battle of the Bulge, we came into Bastogne, B-A-S-T-O-G-N-E, and Belgium, and it was the last, it turned out to be the last battle in Europe. What originally happened, when Hitler invaded Europe he had a treaty with Stalin, "Stay away. We're friends. Stay here. Let me conquer Europe. You do whatever you want in Asia, whatever, but let me conquer Europe." And they had a deal going. But for whatever reason, maybe he got too confident, Hitler did, but once he conquered France and was about to conquer England he got too greedy and he decided, "Why not invade Russia too?" Did you know that he invaded Russia and came within this much of conquering Russia?

They were in Moscow. They were in Leningrad. They were in the Balkan, I mean the, I forget the southern part of Russia. They came within this much of conquering Russia. But the [00:20:37] for Hitler, he picked the wrong time of the year, the middle of the winter.

Q: Right, like Napoleon.

A: And Russians, they're used to zero degree temperature.

Q: And what time of year was the Battle of the Bulge? It was also winter, wasn't it?

A: So we come into the last-- Hitler was just about-- Russia had already invaded Germany from the east. We're coming up, General Patton and General Clark and Bradley, they're coming up from Africa, southern France into Germany, and we're going to invade Germany. So, we met at Belgium and Bastogne. We brought 25,000 troops and we dropped them in the city at Bastogne, and that would help conquer the rest of Germany, because Italy was done. Italy had already surrendered. We had already invaded Italy. We were about to, Russia was about to invade Germany. We allowed Russia to invade Germany as long as they allowed us to invade France and Belgium and Italy, so we bring the ship there and all of a sudden 25,000 troops are in Bastogne, among other ships and troops, and the Germans as a last resort, they sent a thousand planes to attack us. We sent a thousand planes from Africa or France and England to attack the German planes. So, 2,000 planes over the ocean, over the high seas, over the country, Bastogne, so they made us all go below deck for safety while the fighting was going on above us. And all we heard for four and a half hours, one bomb after the other, one machine gun, one attack after the other. 2,000 planes at one time, and we're below deck, not knowing if we're going to be sunk or drowned in the middle of the ocean.

And I'm happy to say, as you can tell, I survived.

Q: Thank goodness that you survived it. So, what was the aftermath? Did you get off at that point?

A: So, finally after we drove the Germans away and they brought us back up, and that was the end of it, and that's when Hitler killed himself. And that was the end of the war, but not for me. I had, in those days you needed a certain amount, 80 points of service and you could be discharged. I was in the service at that time, '42 to '45, three years I had over a hundred points. I had more ribbons, more medals than Eisenhower and McArthur combined.

Q: That's amazing.

A: Every time I was overseas another ribbon, an overseas ribbon, every time we were attacked a medal, if we were attacked and could be killed. I had four rows of ribbons and medals. Every six months on your sleeve you had a bar that consisted of six months of service. I'm in there for four and a half years. I had two rows of bars, eight rows of ribbons and medals. People saluted me and I was only a Private.

Q: That's amazing. So, how did the service end for you?

A: Oh yeah. So, I have enough points to get discharged-- wrong. There is still a war on in Japan. There is still somebody to beat, to fight in the west coast. So, what did they do? They transferred us to San Francisco so we could prepare for the invasion of Japan. So, we went through the Suez Canal, from Africa we went to the Suez Canal, crossed the Atlantic, entered the Panama Canal, and came to San Francisco, and that was our base of operation. So we started to, once we were in San Francisco we were getting ready to send troops to Manilla to reconquer the Philippines once they took McArthur out and sent him to Australia to get ready to invade Japan. He had already, he lost the Philippine Islands, McArthur had lost, so they took him out and sent him to Australia to prepare the invasion of Japan.

So, we brought troops to Hawaii, Guam, and there is a little country right next to the Philippines, Leyte, if you ever heard of it, and we dropped anchor in Leyte and Manilla, and eventually we conquered Manilla.

Q: So you were in Manilla.

A: I was in Manilla. And that brings me to my next adventure.

Q: Okay.

A: Besides Piccadilly Circus, besides Battle of the Bulge, my next major adventure, after we conquered Manilla what would a normal soldier say? Sightsee. I want to see what the Philippines look like, what Manilla looks like. I had geography in school. I heard about the Philippines and I wanted to see it. So, once we had conquered Manilla, the Philippines, and we're getting ready to invade Japan, so we bring our troops into Manilla and I said, "Let's sightsee the Philippine Islands." So I went off the ship and right outside Leyte the Japanese had dropped hundreds of bombs in Manilla Bay when they lost the war there, so we couldn't go into Manilla Bay, so right outside Manilla, Leyte, the Bay of Leyte, there is a little ship that would take us into the harbor, but it was a Navy ship and it was a rope ladder. So, it's not a normal--

Q: Like a ladder?

A: It wasn't a normal-- What do you call it--

Q: A gangplank?

A: A gangplank. It wasn't a normal gangplank. It was rope and it was 10 feet above the ship, 10 feet, and you had to jump, but you had to be careful that the waves were moving the ship all over the place. If you jumped at the wrong time you would drown or you're dead or you hit your head on the ship. What to do? There was eight of us, eight of us that worked in the PX, so I panicked, I'm the first guy down the rope ladder, and seven people are behind me, waiting to jump. I panicked. I want to get back on the ship. I don't want to go to Manilla anymore. I'm afraid. But there was seven people behind me, "Come on, jump! We don't want to go back. You're the first one." And seven guys didn't want to go back and so I can get off the ship. So, what did the guy in back of me do? Stomped on my hand and made me let go of the rope.

Q: So you jumped.

A: I had to jump. And where did I jump? Into the ocean. I don't know how to swim. So what do I do? Drown. But I didn't drown.

Q: So, who got you out?

A: Well, once I got into the ocean there was all the sailors on that little ship, they all jumped in, they all jumped overboard, lifejackets, everything, and they put me right up.

Q: So, did you ever get to see Manilla?

A: No.

__: For all that.

A: I never wanted to see Manilla.

Q: And so when did your service actually end?

A: When the atomic bomb was dropped in August. We were ready to invade Japan around September. August the two atomic bombs were dropped and Japan surrendered. We didn't have to invade. So--

Q: So did you come home at that point?

A: Not quite. We went back, we brought the troops into Japan, army of occupation more or less, and they were going to recondition the ship, turn it back into a private ship again. It was a luxury liner. And they gave me a choice, stay, either get discharged, once they sent me back to the States, once the ship went back to San Francisco I would be eventually a discharged serviceman, I had more than enough time. It was 1946. I served my time faithfully. But they gave me a choice. If I wanted to wait until they reconditioned the ship and brought this Diplomat that had been interned in Japan and Germany that had been interned, we were going to bring them back to their native countries, and that meant six months more for them to recondition. I could have done that. I would have been a Sargent. I would have had a wonderful time. They put a swimming pool in. It was a luxury liner. But I had served. I had served almost five years. I said, "Enough is enough."

Q: Okay. So do you remember--

A: Wait a minute. I'm not done yet.

Q: Oh okay, there is more. That's great.

A: Two things.

Q: Okay.

A: Would you say I am Black or White?

Q: You have a wonderful tan in these pictures.

A: Would you say I'm not a Black person?

Q: No, you just look very tan and handsome.

A: Black. Never mind. Would you say I'm Black? You know I'm not, but would you think I was-- I'm visiting my sister. I'm on a furlough waiting to be discharged. I have a sister who lives in Texas.

Q: Oh, that's how you got your Texas.

A: Texas, they have a law down south, the Black people have to go in the back of the bus. So, I am visiting my sister. You want to see a Black person? Bring it down there.

Q: So you had a good transition coming back after the Army?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was it like to get home?

A: It was wonderful, because I knew it was the end, enough.

Q: You were more than ready.

A: I was more than ready.

Q: But how did it sort of affect your life, all these experiences?

A: I met my wife, so that affected me. I met Barry then.

Q: And what was your feeling about the war, the military in general after having served all those years?

A: Well, I was lucky, I felt. I survived two sinkings. I survived that Manilla incident. And thank god I came out of it alive.

Q: It's amazing. Yeah, you have wonderful stories to tell.

A: Well, there is one more.

Q: Just one more question. What would you like people to remember in a hundred years from now? Since this is a project that we hope will last for a while and your tape and your testimony, what would you like people to remember or know?

A: That I survived.

Q: That is important.

A: I mean I am a very normal person and didn't know how to swim. I'm not a hero. I'm not a Marine. I wouldn't go out of my way to volunteer to the service. But when I had to serve I did

my duty and I served honorably with a hundred different ribbons and medals. And let me tell you the final story.

Q: Okay. We have time, I think.

A: I'm visiting my sister in Texas and I go on the bus. The bus driver says, "You lousy nigger, get in the back of the bus. Get in the back of the bus." Take a look at that. I don't blame him. I says, "Who me?" He says, "Yeah you, you lousy nigger. Get in the back of the bus or I'll throw you off." I said, "I'm White." He says, "You're a damn liar. You're not White. Look at you." And I had to take off my-- Luckily I had my ID from the Army.

Q: And you could show him.

A: It says White. He didn't believe it. He said, "That's not you."

Q: That's amazing. So then you went from Texas back to Boston?

A: Yeah, and never saw, and never went down south again while I had a tan.

Q: I can understand that. So you stayed in the Boston area then?

A: Always been in Boston from the minute I was born. I was born-- You know any part of Boston?

Q: Yes.

A: You know the West End?

Q: Yes.

A: How do you know that?

Q: Just from being here for a while.

A: The West End consisted from Scully Square to the Mass General Hospital North Station. We lived in Beacon Hill, almost a hundred years old. Did you know I'm almost a hundred? 99 years of age. I still drive.

Q: That's amazing. And you have told some wonderful stories. We're so happy that you were able to do this with us.

A: The final story.

Q: Do we have time for one more? One more that you would like people to know or remember. These are wonderful.

A: No, this will only take a second. We were told by the Captain of the ship, thanked us, they thanked us for all that we did for them while they were in the Army, and he said, "Any time you want to use our ship, free of charge any trip."

Q: Really? Oh my goodness. This is beautiful.

A: Yeah.

Q: And when was this?

A: That was right after I was married.

__: He was married in 1947.

Q: These are amazing. So I'm hoping they can take some photos of these. And this, thank you so much for doing this. It's really been an honor.

A: I'm glad I could do it, because I have fond memories. Thank god.

Q: No but it's wonderful to share this. Thank you for sharing it and to be part of this Newton Talks Oral Project. Really it's wonderful.

A: I do have one more story. I'm not going to tell it to you, because you don't have the time.

Q: But you've told us some wonderful things.

A: That is the Boston Globe. I helped a person dying. I stayed with him from the time he had a stroke. He was in the Army. He was the same age as I was. We served in the same area. And this was at the Golda Meir House right over here. 86 years old and he was dying, and I stayed with him until he died.

Q: That was very kind, really very thoughtful. Can we get some of these too? We'll take some photos of these if that is okay with you? We'll take some pictures of these so we can include that. Thank you so much.

A: And take some pictures of my Black.

Q: You were very handsome.

A: I didn't say I wasn't handsome.

END OF INTERVIEW